



Information and communications technology (ICTs) have the potential to empower young women and girls across the world and help them engage with their communities, participants at a United Nations online forum said yesterday.

“When we combine technology with young women we are making sure that they are not just empowered but also that they are able to contribute to the development of their society,” the Secretary-General’s Youth Envoy, Ahmad Alhendawi, said during the ‘Innovate Your Future’ online conversation held on the Google+ platform.

Mr. Alhendawi, who has extensive experience working with youth in the Middle East, said women are increasingly turning to technology to tackle complex situations in their countries.

“They use ICTs not just for political change, but to help their communities,” he said, adding that linking online and offline activities is essential to turn ICTs into a transformational development tool.

However, he stressed that ensuring young women have access to ICTs is still a big challenge, particularly in developing countries.

Academy Award-winning actress Geena Davis, who is the International Telecommunication Union ([ITU](#)) Special Envoy for women and Girls in ICT, pointed out that even when girls have access to ICTs, their representation in media, including online, is inaccurate and does not encourage their engagement with technology.

Research conducted by Ms. Davis' Institute on Gender and Media found that in family movies produced in the United States – which is a major exporter of entertainment across the world – for every female character in a family movie there are three male characters.

“What kids are seeing is very much bereft of female presence,” Ms. Davis said. “This needs to change. Girls need to be more involved in the production and entrepreneurial nature of this technology explosion [...] and have their status elevated in the culture by seeing themselves represented in more interesting, varied, and non-traditional ways.”

Doreen Bogdan-Martin of the ITU Strategic Planning and membership noted that governments can make a difference by supporting women's participation in the ICT workforce and encouraging young women to take up careers in the technology sector.

“Governments also are key to enabling access to ICTs,” Ms. Bogdan-Martin said. “Many countries are now including gender in their national broadband plans, promoting access and training women to use ICTs.”

She also pointed out that during a time when youth unemployment in many regions of the world is a concern, there is a steady demand for individuals with ICT skills, and Governments must make young people aware of these opportunities.

The Google+ hangout participants, who also included the Chief Marketing Officer of the online magazine *Mashable*, Stacey Green, and the Chief Marketing Officer of Cisco, Blair Christie, agreed that the issue of young women and ICTs must be directly referenced in the post-2015

agenda, which seeks to build on the anti-poverty goals known as the Millennium Development Goals ([MDGs](#)). ICTs, they said, will enable a more progressive and more empowering agenda for young women.

The online conversation, moderated by Gary Fowlie, head of the ITU Strategy and Policy Unit, was part of the Economic and Social Council's overall "Innovate Your Future" social media campaign on how the world's youth use science and technology to tackle challenges in their communities.

Source: [UN News Centre](#)